

**Remarks by Ambassador Adam Ereli Marking the Launch of the Middle East/North  
Africa Businesswomen's Network  
December 5, 2010**

Thank you very much, and thank you Afnan Al-Zayani, the first President of the Businesswomen's Network, for those inspiring words. You always find the right things to say. Obviously I, on behalf of the American Embassy and the U.S. government, I am extraordinarily pleased and proud to be here today. The Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative at the State Department called me the other day, told me about this event and asked me if I wanted to participate. I assured them that of course I wanted to participate. There is nothing more important to me as the Ambassador and to the Embassy and U.S. government than this event, in Bahrain, today. I say this because the empowerment of women, providing women the opportunity to contribute fully to their societies – not just in Bahrain, but around the world – is a key priority of the US government. I think Secretary Clinton really put it best when she said that we can't expect countries to increase their economic standing and their foundations for security, democracy and opportunity unless women are at the table. And I think today's event symbolizes in a very real and tangible way what those ideas mean. It is also the culmination of a lot of hard work and time and effort by many people from many different countries, starting with Vital Voices, those listed as sponsors, and all of you. It's also important to acknowledge what the U.S. government has done – not just to support this organization, but women's empowerment in general in the Middle East.

In the last eight years we've devoted about \$300 million to women's empowerment. Over the last two years, we've funded 17 projects worth \$42 million in the Middle East. And I think today's event celebrates one of the great successes of this partnership. As Afnan Al Zayani said, five years ago the Businesswomen's Network was just an idea. Today it has become a reality, with the incorporation of a formal network of businesswomen from ten different countries in the Middle East: Bahrain, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, UAE and Qatar.

You have already accomplished a great deal. You have supported over 20,000 entrepreneurs in business and professional women to develop their skills and talents not only in business, but beyond. You have generated over 140 new women-owned businesses. You've been a model of how public-private partnerships can tap into a reservoir of untapped potential and create networks of support and build locally-driven and locally-supported organizations that bring about change. And really that's the one thing that's very important to recognize: the ability to bring about change.

You know, I spend a lot of time meeting with people who have ideas about how to improve the lives and future of the people of their countries. And if I had a dollar for every good idea that

people suggest, I'd be a millionaire. But there are very few times that the ideas that people suggest at conferences or similar venues that ultimately become a reality. What I find so inspiring and praiseworthy is that all of you have taken an idea and over the course of five years and an incredible amount of energy and dedication and persistence have translated that idea into reality. That is an amazing accomplishment and I think you should be recognized for it, I think you should be congratulated for it, I think you should be honored for it. A lot of people say that this is just the beginning and that you are going to have to prove yourselves. But I think you've already proven yourselves. You proven yourselves by giving of yourselves and making this organization happen. To me, your success is more or less guaranteed because you have been a success already. But if I could leave you with one idea, it is about the measurement of success. In addition to the number of businesses you've created and opportunities you've given to people, the thing that also defines success is that the members of the Business women's Network serve as role models for future generations of women – women who look to you as examples and want to become like you. As long as you provide that example and that vision and that promise that dreams *do* come true, and as long as you have conveyed the message that with a lot of hard work and dedication, you can become a successful, influential businesswoman or political activist who can make a positive impact on your societies, you will have succeeded.

Thank you very much.